

Veterans initiate meeting in Vilnius

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Lithuania, H.E. Mr. Vladimir Drazhin, meets local Great Patriotic War veterans to discuss tour of battlefields

The WWII veterans' organisation, uniting those who fought on the side of the anti-Hitler coalition, stresses that members are grateful to Belarus for its care of veterans from Lithuania. Many have traversed Belarus to visit the battlefields of the 16th Lithuanian Division, with which many of them fought. Others are about to undertake the journey, recalling their days of fighting with the regular army or with partisan groups in Belarus. The Ambassador has learnt of their work in educating the younger generation in patriotic matters and their efforts to fundraise to help elderly veterans living alone on modest pensions. On Victory Day, ever more people come to Antakalnis Cemetery in Vilnius to pay their respects.

The Chairman of the Vilnius organisation of WWII veterans, Kostas Banevicius, has asked Mr. Drazhin to help organise a meeting in Vilnius for the heads of Belarusian veterans' organisations. Tours of WWII battlefields in Lithuania could be arranged, with guests able to see how Lithuanian veterans live and how they celebrate memorable dates. Mr. Drazhin promises that all veterans' wishes will be taken into account. "We may not be wealthy, but we're dignified," he notes. "Belarusians always help those who request aid. We want to preserve the memory of this war and its heroes, without falsifying events; accordingly, your words and memories are vital."

Constitution of medieval Belarus returns in the country after 400 years

Belarusians in Russia join Mogilev residents in raising money to purchase Statute of Grand Duchy of Lithuania from private collector for \$45,000

By Viktor Korbut

The solemn handing over of the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to the Museum of Mogilev History was hosted by the National History Museum in Minsk. Amazingly, the book — purchased from a Moscow collector — is the only original exemplar of the set of laws, published in 1588; these operated in Belarus until 1840, being a judicial document with the power of law. The acquisition of the book is important for the whole country.

Back in the 19th century, researchers from Poland and Russia dedicated works to the Statute, studying its articles in old Belarusian language (which wasn't an official language but was studied to correctly explain the words of the ancient legal document). 200 years ago, Belarusian language was expected to become extinct yet the new Constitution of contemporary Belarus is written in this language. The medieval Constitution (the Statute) is understandable to any Belarusian without translation.

The Statute gives proof of an early 20th century Belarusian national Renaissance, showing high culture and our own national legislation — written in our native language. The edition released in 1588 is a forerunner of Belarus' modern day statehood and independence.

Belarus' Culture Minister, Pavel Latushko, stresses that the acquisition of the first original Statute 'is an exceptionally important event for domestic history and culture'. He explains, "It's evident that



Statute of Grand Duchy of Lithuania transferred to Museum of Mogilev History

historical and cultural treasures should be returned to their homeland; much has been done to promote this at state level, with around Br10bn allocated from the budget to museums to buy historical and cultural treasures, returning them to Belarus. This year, four Slutsk sashes have been purchased and these are to be kept at the Radziwills' Palace in Nesvizh. Moreover, the last four years have seen the National History Museum purchase 179 unique historical and cultural treasures — now part of its collection."

In mid-May, the Museum of Mogilev History announced a charity campaign to raise funds for the purchase of the unique book, sold by electronic auction in Moscow for \$45,000. The seller, the owner of an antiquarian shop in Moscow, requested ten percent of

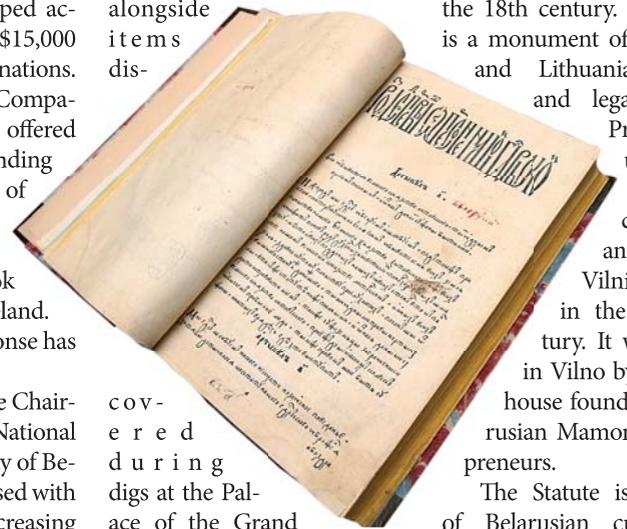
the sum within a fortnight but Belarus managed to collect the whole sum within almost three weeks.

Mogilev residents and Belarusians born in the Mogilev Region but now living and working in Russia helped acquire the book, with \$15,000 collected via private donations. The Alpari Group of Companies from Moscow offered the remainder, responding to the National Bank of Belarus' request for assistance in returning the unique book to its historical homeland. The international response has been wonderful.

Valery Kazakov, the Chairman of the Federal National and Cultural Autonomy of Belarusians in Russia, liaised with Alpari, showing the increasing role of the Belarusian diaspora. Mr. Kazakov notes that, along-

side his fellow countrymen, he'll continue helping his historical homeland acquire national relics.

Symbolically, the Statute is on display in the hall of the National History Museum, alongside items dis-



covered during digs at the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, restored in Vilnius 200 years

after its destruction. Belarusians and Lithuanians share a common history of statehood — from the foundation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 13th century to its joining with the Russian Empire in the 18th century. The Statute is a monument of Belarusian and Lithuanian culture and legal thought. Probably, this unique set of laws was compiled and edited at Vilnius Palace in the 16th century. It was printed in Vilno by a printing house founded by Belarusian Mamonichs entrepreneurs.

The Statute is a symbol of Belarusian culture and our close ties with European neighbours.

Passports issued at age of 14

Passport age falls from 16 to 14 years in Belarus

By Igor Ivanishin

In line with a Presidential decree, administrative procedures conducted by state bodies and other organisations have been updated, aiming to simplify public services. Those residing temporarily in Belarus will gain equal rights with Belarusians permanently residing abroad regarding the right to receive a driver's license and to register vehicles in Belarus. Foreigners



living in Belarus permanently will also be able to purchase and keep guns for the purpose of hunting

and those living in Belarus temporarily will be able to purchase guns in Belarus, while being able to export and import them.

The decree also reduces the age at which Belarusian citizens will be able to receive a passport: from 16 to 14 years (enhancing 14 and 15 year olds' ability to realise legal rights). The document also envisages quicker state registration of property, allowing transactions to take place more promptly.

800,000 Belarusian citizens reside in Russia

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belarus to Russia, H.E. Mr. Andrei Kobaykov, tells us that Belarusian citizens are evenly spread across Russia, with eight out of eleven branches of the Belarusian Embassy fulfilling consular functions in the regions

"It's vital that Belarusian citizens in Russia receive

all the necessary consular services," asserts Mr. Kobaykov. He underlines that the major function of Belarusian consular offices in Russia is to promote trade and economic ties. Belarus has established legislation governing co-operation with 80 Russian regions, while long-term agreements on collaboration in various spheres have been concluded with over 60 Russian regions.